

It Happened Here
A Template for Process



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Introduction



This document proposes a template for generating site-specific heritage-focused performances for the forthcoming *It Happened Here* project.

In *Contexts and Themes* I discuss the project: its outlines and timelines, outcomes and participants; the University of East London's *Site-Specific Project* Module –a developing mode of generating similar work from third year Undergraduates, recently undertaken at Hoxton Hall; a brief sketch of the surrounding trends of Museology, Youth Arts, Archive studies and the 2012 Olympics.

In *A Template for Process* I suggest a methodology for use during the project. This methodology has strands to accommodate the differing sites *It Happened Here* will engage with. It makes use of the just published *Performance, Learning and Heritage* Research Report (University of Manchester), a valuable enquiry into similar work.

In *A list of anticipated Resources* I detail and cost the items most likely to be used in the delivery of the project, and a brief rationale for each.

In *It Happened Here: a suggested artefact* I discuss the residues of process, and how to define and create a model of leaving work for the Archives of institutions the project works with.

The text is punctuated with images taken of performances of *The Sixth Line*, a site-specific performed tour of Hoxton Hall by third year Undergraduates on the University of East London's *Community Arts Practice* degree in December, 2008.

Contexts and Themes



The Project

It Happened Here (IHH) is a project enabling 12–19 year olds to pursue historical enquiry at three heritage sites

- Hoxton Hall
- The Geffrye Museum
- Building Exploratory's current place of work

and use the material generated from these enquiries to devise and deliver site-specific performances. It is expected that these performances will be delivered predominantly to school audiences. The participants are expected to be recruited from schools and youth groups. All project deliverers will need to possess CRB clearance. Disabled access is currently problematic at Hoxton Hall (Ground Floor only), and needs to be assessed for Building Exploratory's site.

The three sites (all members of Hackney Heritage and Built Environment Partnership) will host the *IHH* process for approximately one school term each per year and facilitate the performance day that will round off the term's work. The project is due to begin delivery in

- June, 2009 (Summer Term) at the Geffrye Museum.

To be followed by

- late September, 2009 (Autumn Term) at Hoxton Hall
- late January, 2010 (Spring Term) at Building Exploratory's current site of focus.

Each term will include eight two hour sessions delivered on site for approximately ten participants, enabling them to practice historical enquiry in a local (Hackney/Shoreditch) context, while allowing their contemporary questions to shape the performances devised from this research. A day of performance will conclude the public aspect of the learning process, to be followed by an informal evaluation with participants and project staff (who should include specialist site staff).

Development and Links

The project will be a useful model to track for future development of participatory arts processes, both institutionally and individually. There is scope for academic involvement in the project, if only at a discrete (observational) level. An opportunity to canvas for this will arise in late January, 2009 at the *East End Seen Through Performance* conference, organised by the East London Theatre Archive (ELTA).

Involvement of archive specialists from ELTA should be similarly canvassed –their presence at an early session could provide the beginning of a research methodology for the participants, and should be a relaxed, informal exercise aimed at unlocking the notion of historical enquiry.

Product

An artefact will be created in the form of a curated archive box containing

- Audio CDs
- Performance Script
- Props List
- Costume List
- Group information/process narratives
- Photographic and other documentation (on CD)
- Evaluation (from audience evaluation forms and in-group)
- A USB stick containing digital copy of all the above

Performance and Heritage

It is anticipated that performances and research material generated during *IHH* will be re-staged afterwards –by the same performers or others– as part of the *Hackney Stories* event. Assuming the project runs for two years this will allow for a made-to-measure bank of performances and narratives to emerge, with the potential to be rolled out in the Olympic countdown, ensuring that local voices have a profile.

Site-specific performance process

As Visiting Lecturer/Performance Writer at the University of East London from February, 2006 I have delivered the third year Undergraduate *Site-Specific Project* (as part of *Community Arts Practice* B.A. Hons). This module has run for two years, at Sutton House (Autumn Term, 2007) and Hoxton Hall (Autumn Term, 2008).

On both occasions performances were devised from archive material and wider research –Sutton House’s performances were given exclusively to local primary schools, while Hoxton Hall’s were ticketed events, open to all. Both groups have been small (ten and eight participants respectively), an ideal number for short, concentrated projects, with sufficient viewpoints to generate healthy debate and creative ideas. The theoretical study component of the UEL process is not appropriate to *IHH*, but some of its concerns can be reframed, and inform the field. Examples can be found in the *Bibliography*.

My central concern with the *Site-Specific Project* has been to calibrate the need for devised performances to draw on site-based research with a limited contact time that also needs to advance performance

practice. It has become clear that a 'map of research' should be drawn up in advance for each site. This might take the form of a checklist, with a variety of potentially useful sources already identified and available in book or photocopy form.

The map might take the form of concentric circles orbiting the site (which is at the map's centre), in three rings, with evidence and research pre-ranked as to its 'closeness' to the site. Two texts per participant over an initial research phase (weeks 3–4) would produce a quick pool of learning, and sufficient avenues for performance enquiry to develop. This will obviously require careful liaison and pre-planning by the project manager and site staff. Copyright declarations will need to be submitted.

Other outcomes

Museology and Archive studies have been enjoying a recent expansion of interest, reflected in an increased number of academic courses. A drive to render curation more transparent, less 'privileged', has allowed the possibility to work with sites and objects previously out of bounds of participation and engagement. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLAC)'s learning and social outcomes stress the importance of participation and access in member institutions.

One of the Cultural Olympiad's ten principal projects is a partnership between the MLAC and LOCOG (London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games). *Stories of the World* will "entail a series of exhibitions across the country, featuring collections reinterpreted by communities, historians, artists and other fresh voices"¹. Core Delivery Partners will be selected in early 2009, and will

¹ http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/programmes/setting_pace/stories%20of%20the%20world accessed 4/1/09, at 20:18.

begin selecting Local Delivery Partners later in the year. There is obviously scope for advocating *IHH*'s presence at the Geffrye Museum for involvement in this project.

Project SWOT

Strengths	Comments
Unique project.	Stress the USP of the project.
Breadth of sites.	Feedback evaluations between sites.
Small participant group size.	Don't overburden participants.
Clear project aims.	Keep these under evaluation.

Weaknesses	Comments
No 'reward' for participants.	Inducements for completion of process: vouchers?
12–19 ability range can be large.	Grade research tasks accordingly.
Lack of recruitment 'structure'.	Develop realistic links quickly.
Limited contact time.	Careful planning and constant evaluation of delivery.

Opportunities	Comments
<i>Stories of the World</i> involvement.	Watch the mla.gov.uk website.
Development of Olympics product.	Keep up to date with Cultural Olympiad activities/strategy.
Commodification of archive material.	Further exploration of the artefact as aesthetic object.
Using IHH as a template for wider participatory site-specific/ethnographic projects.	Keep template(s) under development.

Threats	Comments
Non-completion/non-attendance.	Keep material fresh and its delivery pertinent and clear.
Lack of site understanding of projects.	Establish clear communication and liaison between sites/partners.
Too many inputs.	Agree on clear strategy.
Staging of schools' performances.	Careful planning to accommodate.

Glossary

The International Museum and Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) has defined a set of key terms for the sector. It is worth repeating here those with direct relevance for *IHH*, especially as the distinctions can be subtle. The *Summary Report* also contains a highly recommended Institutional Checklist for performance processes (p17–18, included in **Appendix**).

- *Interpretation*. A communication process designed to reveal to a specific audience the significance of a site (and the audience's relationship to it) through a first-hand experience involving interaction with another person, a place, an object or an artefact.
- *Live Interpretation*. Used to cover many activities, ranging from non-costumed demonstrations of historical craft to storytelling and costumed first- and third-person interpretation.
- *First person interpretation*. Where an interpreter assumes a particular role, either from the premise that he/she has moved

forward through time to the present, or that his/her audience has moved backwards through time to his/her past.

- *Third person interpretation.* Where an interpreter dresses in appropriate costume and has a full knowledge of the life of a particular character or a specific era, but does not assume that role (i.e. can speak authoritatively of the character's life and times, but remains a twenty-first century person discussing the past.
- *Museum Theatre.* A specific kind of interpretation that employs fictional activity to communicate ideas, facts and concepts.
- *Re-enactment.* A detailed recreation of a single short-term historical event (such as a battle, designed to attract a large number of spectators), where action, costume and combat often take precedence over the spoken word.
- *Role-play.* Where the audience as well as the interpreter takes on a role or roles within a particular scenario or performance which support the plot, which may or may not involve advance preparation and the wearing of appropriate costume.
- *Story-telling.* Where the interpreter focuses on a particular story rather than on wearing an authentic costume or playing a particular character.²

² Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd *Performance, Learning and Heritage -Report* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2008) p9-10.

A Template for Process



The following template is intended as a guide to process rather than a rulebook. The devising period of any performance work is inevitably fluid and needs to be responsive enough to cope with both unexpected finds (research) and ideas (for performance) and emergencies.

Given that three very different sites will be occupied during the project and that one (the Geffrye Museum) is an object-based environment, outcomes are likely to be various. IMTAL's glossary of terms covers performance but does not address installation work, which might be appropriate at the Geffrye Museum, in which case the template below would need to be altered accordingly. Installation could also be combined with performance (the vitrine as visible curation of reply).

There is scope for other deliverers to be involved in on-site project work. Site staff should contribute: their insights and skills are valuable for the project to illustrate to participants how sites work. Creative Practitioner contributions are possible, but should be employed carefully: limited contact time (sixteen hours with participants leading up to performance) demands consistency of approach and personnel – too many inputs have the potential to overburden participants and expend too much time on trust-building. I recommend a maximum of three staff involved in each *IHH* site-based process:

1. Project Manager/Lead deliverer
2. Site staff (archivist/education or access officer)
3. Creative Practitioner.

With the contact time available a 20 minute performance is a realistic aim, allowing for repeats on performance day. Attention should be paid to when practical sessions and performances are held. Saturdays seem ideal for the former, but present difficulties for the latter, when schools audiences might be harder to organise and finance. Is there scope for the project to deliver to general/ambient audiences?

Performance frameworks could include

1. A Guided Tour: a promenade piece, encountering 'scenes' on its journey through the site
2. Static performance, in one demarcated area of a site
3. A series of static –and thematically linked– 'scenes' spread throughout the site, found by its audience on its way through the site, but without a Guide
4. Installation: sound/other media projected or exhibited at key points of the site, institutionally labelled
5. A blend of the above: for example A Guided Tour that includes Installation pieces *and* 'scenes'.

Rather than impose a one-size-fits-all approach to the performance(s) it is better to acknowledge that successful devising processes play to the strengths of their participants, and alter their outcomes accordingly. Some participants might be more interested in (and comfortable with) the historical enquiry strand of the project than overt performance (and vice versa) –these preferences need to be catered for.

Some aspects of performances could be pre-recorded:

1. Video, projected on appropriate surfaces or screens
2. Audio. Readings of collated research material; interviews with members of staff or those with emotional involvement with the site or its histories; creative responses (such as *Past-as-wished-for*)
3. Photographically, via digital photo frames or prints.

A particularly fruitful aspect to site-specific performance is the use of the 'gift' as an effective entry narrative and strategy for audience involvement. *IHH* could pursue investigation of this strategy further, as it represents a cost- (and time-) effective method of inducting an audience into site, performance and research, and a souvenir of it.

Week	Phase	Activity	Outcomes/reminders
1	Introduction to Project and Site	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to Project 2. Site tour 3. Historical enquiry and performance: discussion 4. Simple group performance exercises with one research text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Canvas participants' interests/skills • Write site report (individual) • Ensure all staff are CRB checked • Stress peer-to-peer response throughout
2	Understanding Site	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Site and sense: practical exploration of site and ways of exploring/ presenting it 2. Site and thought: issues of curation and propriety 3. Site and story: a scratch performance (single or group) 4. The Archive and the Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Direct participants to tasks on the basis of their previous interests /skills • Include own contributions to practical work • Documentation demonstration • Light touch Archive session if possible
3	Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research Map: introduction 2. Distribute individual texts (I) 3. First readings on site (find an appropriate place in which to read/place each text) 4. Pool research and collate information 5. Questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks to take account of ability range • Plant effective modes of research-led performance in discussions • Ask participants to keep text and re-read
4	Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recap process and research so far 2. Distribute individual texts (II) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks • Encourage ownership of

4	Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Readings on site (as week 3, but in a different place) 4. Pool research and collate information 5. Set <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> (one side of A4) 	<p>Research material, and 'own' research (where applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> parameters
5	Research into Story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recap process and research so far 2. Read/place/perform <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> texts 3. Combine research texts and <i>Past-as-wished-for</i>. Read/place/perform 4. Build narrative base through collation of key research findings 5. Digitally record one or more combination pieces and replay in situ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks • Be sensitive with <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> • Deliver own <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> • Plant resonances between site and research • Allow revision of <i>Past-as-wished-for</i> as necessary • Mid-point evaluation with all delivery staff
6	Story into performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recap process and narrative base 2. Individual showings of performance/narrative beginnings 3. Feedback 4. Discussion on nature of final performance: mode and roles 5. Set text exercise: one side of A4 further ideas for performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks • Begin 'managed choice': directing group towards appropriate mode and content of performance work • Be clear about ideas wanted in set exercise • Introduce the gift as strategy
7	Developing Performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recap process 2. Discuss ideas for performance 3. Choose one mode of delivery 4. Choose site(s) for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks • Allow vote for ideas if needed, but ensure 'managed choice'

7	Developing Performance	performance 5. Work in site(s) with text. 6. Set further development task	eliminates the inappropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about further development task
8	Developing Performance	1. Recap process 2. Intensive work in situ with text and performance ideas 3. Finalise 'gift' for audiences 4. Finish script 5. Dress rehearsal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Personalise tasks • Ensure performance roles understood and rehearsed • Performance Day details –clarify
9	Performance	1. Dress Rehearsal 2. Performance(s) 3. Restore space after performance(s) 4. Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly warm-up • Health and Safety check • Document performance(s) • Distribute and collect audience evaluation forms • Prepare artefact for handover
10	Evaluation	1. Evaluation with participants, site staff and project staff: (i) written notes (ii) recorded discussion 2. Collate and complete artefact 3. Deliver project artefact to site archive/archivist 4. Summing up: thank you 5. Hand out gift vouchers for completion of project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow evaluation strands to be anonymous (written) and informal (discussion) • Check artefact is complete and labelled, including copies of evaluation notes and discussion • Collate project documentation • Summarise evaluations and distribute to project partners

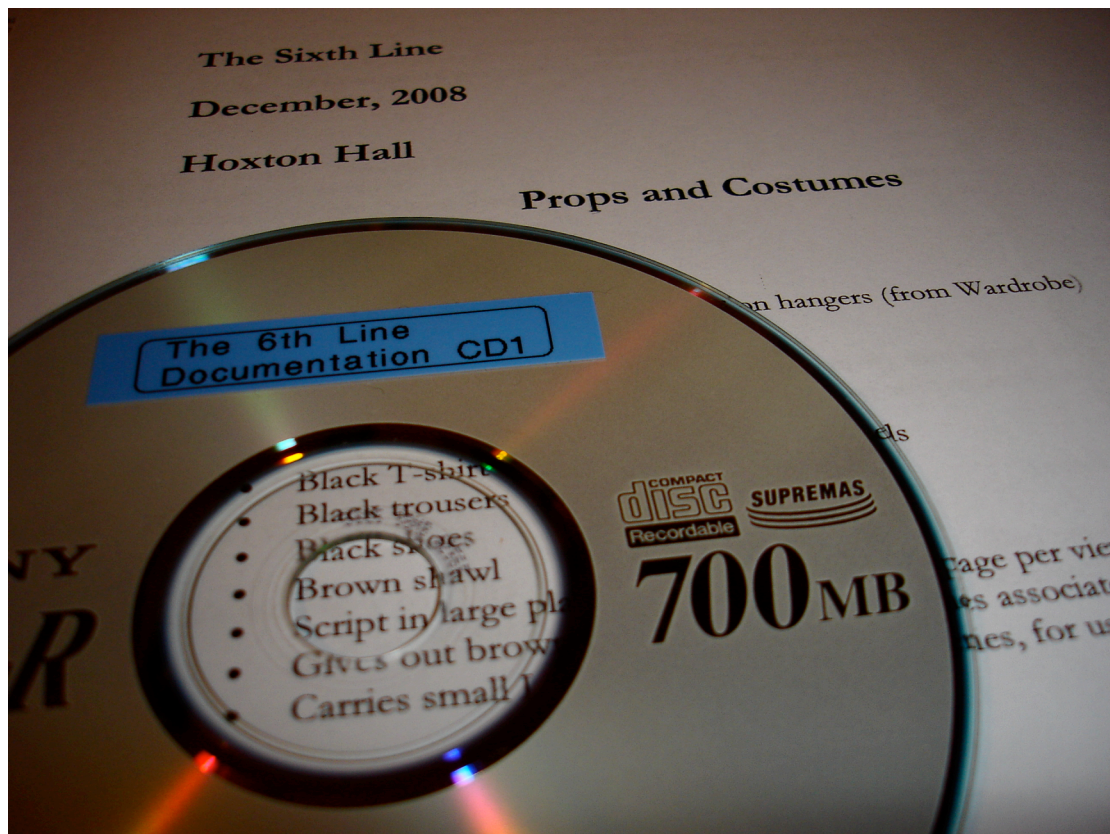
A list of anticipated Resources



- Olympus WS-311M Digital Recorder. *For recording interviews as needed during research and performance development.* £88:09
- 12 Duracell Ultra M3 AAA batteries *for WS-311M.* £10:17
- Muji Cardboard Speakers. *For compact amplification of WS-311M.* £19:52
- 50 blank CDs with jewel cases. *For archive copies of sound files, photographic/other media documentation of process.* £24:40
- Brother PT1000 Printer. *For printed, stylised labelling for research and performance material and archive artefacts.* £19:56
- 2 Brother TZ-531 P-Touch Cartridges *for printer.* £21:58
- Ream of 100gsm Ultra-White Paper. *For best quality printing of Scripts and accompanying process/archive material.* £9:64
- Sony CFDS01 CD Player. *For performance playback of recorded material, and research demonstrations.* £48:89
- 6 A4 Muji Craft Boxes £4:40 each. *To hold the archival material outlined in the following section.* £26:40
- 6 Crucial.com 1 Gigabyte *Gizmo Jr 12mm* USB Memory Drives £5:74 each. *For digital storage of archival material.* £34:44
- Photocopying on site (research material/scripts etc).

Total: £302:69 (including VAT @15%).

It Happened Here: a suggested artefact



Despite an increasing awareness of the archive as concept *and* object, the idea of self-archiving creative process and performed work is still under-used. In order to make the project even more distinctive I propose the construction of an artefact to accompany each term's work, and to be placed at the end of it in the relevant site's archive by one or more of the participants. Since the archive will be gently referenced and exercised during the research phase of the project this ritual should add to the sense of process for the participants.

Standardised printing of labels and pro forma document layouts, accompanied by all process-related sonic and photographic material will add to the project's overall reflection of the circuitry of research and creativity in learning. The artefact could include

- A4 size archive box with printed labelling, and containing
- Audio CD containing interview material, soundscapes and evaluation narratives, labelled
- CD containing photographic (and other media as used) documentation of process, labelled
- Group information (biographical information supplied by participants). *On pro-forma sheets.*
- Script. *On pro-forma sheets.*
- Props list . *On pro-forma sheet.*
- Costume list. *On pro-forma sheet.*
- Evaluation (from audience forms, site staff, project staff and participants): summary and transcribed comments. *On pro-forma sheets.*
- 1 Gigabyte USB Memory stick containing digital copy of all material listed above. Labelled.

Bibliography



A brief list of texts of interest to the project appears below. Pearson, Shanks and Kaye offer creative guidance for site-specific performance processes. Tiller presents research methodologies for local historical and cultural contextual enquiries. Jackson and Kidd's research has yielded the first major study of 'museum theatre' and 'live interpretation', and offers a useful checklist for similar projects.

- *Performance, Learning and Heritage –Executive Summary* Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2008).
- *Site-specific Art: performance, place and documentation* Nick Kaye (London: Routledge, 2000).
- *Theatre/Archaeology –Disciplinary Dialogues* Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2001).
- *In Comes I –Performance, Memory and Landscape* Mike Pearson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006).
- *English Local History –An Introduction* Kate Tiller (London: Sutton Publishing, 2002).

Appendix: *An Institutional Checklist*

Planning checklist

These questions are intended, not to overwhelm with detail, but simply to provide prompts that will help museum and heritage site staff recognise, and enhance, the quality and efficacy of performance in heritage settings.

The site

1. Where do we position performance within the institution in terms of the institution's **structure**? Is it a part of our Outreach or Community Access programme? Or the Education or Curatorial programmes? Or does it cross all programmes, in which case how will it be coordinated most effectively?
2. How can we translate our performance programme and its intentions into a **language** understood elsewhere in the institution?
3. Where do we position performance intellectually – how does it fit with the **goals** of the institution?
4. Do we have a clear **actor interpretation policy** that is understood and implemented by all (including all performers)?
5. How does the performance fit within (or usefully outside) the other interpretive strategies on offer? How does live interpretation **complement** the various other performances being played out 'on site'?
6. How do we best **support the performers**, whose role may often be pivotal in the interpretive strategy of the site and whose skills as actors, researchers and 'facilitators of engagement' with the public need to be valued and developed?
7. Where do we position performance **physically** in the site? How can we ensure that performance is not battling with the institution – tannoy announcements, loud video presentations, sudden changes of location etc.
8. How do we **promote** performance work? Can promotional materials help to make connections to the rest of the site? How do we persuade our 'target groups' that this kind of interpretation might be 'for them'?
9. Do we have appropriate feedback and **evaluation** strategies in place? Are we as a site being honest and reflective about our practice?

The performance

1. How do we **describe and 'frame'** the event (e.g. as re-enactment, story-telling, promenade; as designed for particular audiences/age groups or for the general public)?
2. Who is **facilitating** the interaction? Do we need a separate person (other than the actors) to take on this responsibility?
3. Does the performance need a **dramatic arc** or easily-recognisable shape? A dramatic conclusion? A 'plot' in the traditional sense? Or do we want to be playful with the form in this instance?
4. What are the moments of inspiration/surprise (**the 'wow' factor**) that will provide opportunities for visitor engagement?
5. What place does **empathy** have in the performance? To what extent is it important to inspire empathic engagement with characters in the piece? If it is, how do we ensure that it enlarges rather than narrows understandings (avoiding the 'empathy paradox')?

The content

1. What **style of interpretation/performance** matches our intentions most suitably?
2. How can the **complexity of this heritage** be explored through performance? With, for example, multiple voices, opportunities for dialogue, or audiences taking on roles?
3. How do we ensure opportunities to '**de-brief**' – to question and debate and to make connections with the rest of the site/the exhibitions/subject-matter?
4. What place does the deliberate '**un-settlement**' of audience preconceptions or the creation of moments of 'dissonance' have in the performance – as a means of building on the challenge and providing insight into the subject-matter?
5. What are the points at which the audience is **challenged**, intellectually and/or emotionally, and how far into the event do they occur?
6. How do we ensure the performance and content are appropriately **pitched** – to avoid patronisation at one end of the spectrum and alienation at the other?
7. When sensitive issues are raised in compelling ways, how can the museum provide opportunities for **follow-up**, or plan for an ongoing programme of activities (debates, performances, etc) that continue to address such issues?

The audience

1. Who is/are our **target audience(s)** for this piece?
2. How do we **induct** visitors into the performance event (and the 'rules of the game' - the 'contract')?
3. How and when do we employ **interaction** and **participation** in performance? Are they the best way to achieve our aims in this instance?
4. How and when do we ensure opportunities to exercise **choice** – to opt in or out of the contract?
5. What is the nature of the **transitions** that visitors experience - from 'visitor' to 'audience', to 'participant' and to 'learner', and back again, in museum performance? Do these transitions need to be facilitated? If so, how and by whom?
6. How important is it that we make our audiences **comfortable** – ensuring they can all hear, see, sit? Are there benefits to making them *uncomfortable* (for artistic or other reasons)?
7. How can we ensure that a **care responsibility** is taken for our audience members - especially when we seek to engage them emotionally or physically?
8. How do we ensure opportunities for (and respect the right of) visitors to exercise '**agency**' – to make their own meanings in their own way and to engage in ways that may or not be predictable?